

~99

T H O U G H T S

ON THE

I M P O R T A N C E

OF THE

M A N N E R S O F T H E G R E A T

T O

G E N E R A L S O C I E T Y.

T H E S E C O N D E D I T I O N.

D U B L I N:

P R I N T E D B Y P. B Y R N E (1 0 8) G R A F T O N - S T R E E T.

M. DCC. LXXXVIII.

1578/3836.



THOUGHTS

ON THE

MANNERS OF THE GREAT.

TO a large and honourable class of the community, to persons considerable in reputation, important by their condition in life, and commendable for the decency of their general conduct, these slight hints are respectfully addressed. They are not intended as a satire upon vice, or a ridicule upon

A 2 folly,

folly, being written neither for the foolish nor the vicious. The subject is too serious for ridicule; and those to whom it is addressed are too respectable for satire. It is recommended to the consideration of those who, filling the higher ranks in life, are naturally regarded as patterns, by which the manners of the rest of the world are to be fashioned.

THE mass of mankind, in most places, and in most conditions of life, is perhaps chiefly composed of what may be termed *good kind of people*; for persons of very flagitious wickedness are almost as rare as those of very eminent piety:

to

to the latter of these, admonition were impertinent ; to the former, it were superfluous. These remarks, therefore, are principally written with a view to such persons of rank and fortune who live within the restraints of moral obligation, and acknowledge the truth of the Christian religion : and who, if in certain instances they allow themselves in practices not compatible with a strict profession of Christianity, seem to do it rather from habit and want of reflection, than either from disbelief of its doctrines, or contempt of its precept.

INCONSIDERATION, Fashion, and the World, are three confederates against

Virtue, with whom even good kind of people often contrive to live on excellent terms; and the fair reputation which may be obtained by a complaisant conformity to the prevailing practice, and by mere decorum of manners, without a strict attention to religious principle, is a constant source of danger to the rich and great. There is something almost irresistibly seducing in the contagion of general example; hence the necessity of that vigilance, which it is the business of Christianity to quicken by incessant admonition, and of the world, to lay asleep by the perpetual opiates of ease and pleasure.

A FAIR reputation is one of the most laudable objects of human ambition; yet even this really valuable blessing is sometimes converted into a snare, by inducing a treacherous security as soon as it is obtained. A fatal indolence is apt to creep in upon the soul when it has once acquired the good opinion of mankind, if the acquisition of that good opinion was the ultimate end of its endeavours. Pursuit is at an end when the object is in possession; for he is not likely to "press forward" who thinks he has already "attained." The love of worldly reputation, and the desire of God's favour, have this specific difference, that in the latter, the possession

sion always augments the desire; and the spiritual mind accounts nothing done while any thing remains undone.

BUT after all, a fair fame, and the support of numbers, is obviously a deceitful dependence; for as every individual must die for himself, and answer for himself, both these imaginary resources will fail, just at the moment when they could have been of any use. A good reputation even without internal piety, would be worth obtaining, if the tribunal of heaven were fashioned after the manner of human courts of judicature. If at the general judgment we were to be tried by a jury of our
fellow

fellow mortals, it would be but common prudence to secure their favour at any price ; but it can stand us in little stead in the great day of decision, as it is the consummation of infinite goodness, not to abandon us to the mercy of each other's sentence ; but to reserve us for *his* final judgment who will make strict inquisition into sincerity of heart, and uprightness of intention ; in whose eyes an effectual prayer, or a powerless wish, will outweigh the most splendid profession, or the most dazzling action.

WE cannot but rejoice in every degree of human virtue which operates
favourably

favourably on society, whatever be the motive, or whoever be the actor; and we should gladly commend every degree of goodness, though it be not squared by our own laws and notions: even the good actions of such persons as are too much actuated by a regard to appearances, are not without their beneficial effects. The righteousness of those who occupy this middle region of morality certainly exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; for they are not only exact in ceremonials, but in many respects fulfil the weightier matters of law and conscience. Like Herod, they often “hear gladly, and “do many things.” Yet I am afraid
I shall

I shall be thought severe in remarking that, in general, those characters in the New Testament, of whose future condition no very considerable hope is given, seem to have been taken, not from the profligate, the abandoned, and the dishonourable, but from that decent class commonly described by the term of good sort of people; that mixed kind of character where virtue appears, if it does not predominate. The younger Ruler was certainly one of the first of this order, and yet we are left in dark uncertainty as to his final allotment. The rich man who built him barns and storehouses, and only proposed to himself the full enjoyment of that fortune, which,

which, perhaps, he had very fairly obtained, might have been, for all that appears to the contrary, a very good sort of man; at least, if we may judge of him by multitudes who live precisely for the same purposes, and yet enjoy a good degree of credit, and are rather considered as objects of admiration than of censure.

BUT the most alarming instance is he, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, fared sumptuously every day, and gave nothing to Lazarus; and who is represented after death as lifting up his eyes, being in torments. He committed no enormities that have been transmitted

ted to us; for that he dined well, dressed well, and refused to relieve one beggar, could hardly incur the bitter penalty of eternal misery: his punishment seems to have been the consequence of a hard, worldly, selfish heart, spoilt by the softnesses and delights of life. For after all that corrupt poets, and more corrupt philosophers, have told us of the blandishments of pleasure, and of its tendency to soften the temper, and humanize the affections, it is certain, that nothing hardens the heart like excessive and unbounded luxury; and he who refuses the fewest gratifications to his own voluptuousness, will generally be found the least susceptible of tenderness.

B

for

for the want of others. Prosperity, says the Arabian proverb, fills the heart till it makes it hard ; and the most dangerous pits and snares for human virtue are those, which are so covered over with the flowers of prosperous fortune, that it requires a cautious foot, and a vigilant eye, to escape them.

EVEN Ananias and Sapphira were, I doubt not, well esteemed in society ; for it was enough to establish a very considerable reputation to sell even part of their possessions for religious purposes ; but what an alarm does it sound to hypocrisy, that instead of being rewarded for what they brought, they were punished

nished for what they kept back! And it is to be feared, that this deceitful pair are not the only one, upon whom a good action, without a pure intention, has drawn down a righteous retribution.

FOR though outward actions are the surest, and to human eyes, the only evidences of sincerity, yet Christianity is a religion of *motives* and *principles*. The Gospel is continually referring to the *heart* as the source of good; it is to the poor in *spirit*, to the pure in *heart*, that the divine blessing is annexed. A man may correct many improper practices, and refrain from many

immortal actions, from merely human motives; but, tho' this partial amendment is not without its uses, yet this is only attacking symptoms, and neglecting the mortal disease: but to subdue a worldly temper, to controul irregular desires, and to have a clean heart, is to extinguish the foul, and spirit, and essence of sin. Totally to *accomplish* this, is, perhaps, beyond the narrow limits of human perfection; but to *attempt* it (with an humble reliance on superior aid), is so far from being an extravagant or romantic flight of virtue, that it is but the common duty of every ordinary Christian.

BUT

BUT I must remember, that this is not a sermon, but a mere superficial essay. I am neither an old man, a clergyman, nor a methodist, so that it is at last *possible* that I may be neither actuated by moroseness, self-interest, nor enthusiasm. I live much in the world, and have as much satisfaction in its lawful pleasures, and permitted indulgencies, as other men. I endeavour to cultivate the greatest candour for the opinions, and affection for the persons of all my fellows creatures. I am charmed with the humanity, generosity, and integrity, even of worldly men. But one virtue must not intrench upon another. Charity must not supplant faith.

If a man be generous, good natured and humane, it is impossible not to feel for him the tenderness of a brother; but if, at the same time, he be irreligious, intemperate, or profane, who shall dare to say he is in a safe state? Good humour, and generous sentiments, will always make a man a pleasant acquaintance; but who shall lower the doctrines of the Gospel, to accommodate them to the conduct of men? Who shall bend a strait rule, to favour a crooked practice? Who shall convert that authority which has said, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*

MAY I venture to be a little paradoxical; and while so many grave persons are descanting on the mischiefs of vice, may I be permitted to say a word on the mischiefs of virtue; or, rather, of that shining counterfeit, which, while it wants the specific gravity, has much of the brightness of sterling worth?—Never, perhaps, did any age produce more beautiful declamations in praise of virtue than the present; never were more polished periods rounded in honour of humanity. An ancient Pagan would imagine that Aftrea had returned to take up her abode in our metropolis; a primitive Christian would conclude, that “righteousness and peace had there

met

met together:" but how would they be surpris'd to find that the obligation to these duties was not always thought binding on their eloquent encomiasts! that universal benevolence may subsist with partial injustice, and boundless liberality with sordid selfishness; that one may seem eager in redressing the injuries of half the globe, without descending to the petty detail of private virtues; and burn with zeal for the good of millions one never saw, and yet spread vice and ruin through the little circle of one's own personal influence!

WHEN the general texture of an irregular life is spangled over with some
con-

constitutional pleasing qualities ; when gaiety, good humour, and a thoughtless profusion of expence throw a lustre round the faultiest characters ; it is no wonder that common observers are blinded into admiration : a profuse generosity dazzles them more than all the duties of the decalogue. But though it may be a very usual quality towards securing the election of a borough, it will contribute but little towards making sure the calling and election to the kingdom of heaven. It is somewhat strange that extravagance should be the great criterion of goodness with those very people who are themselves the victims of these idols ; for the prodigal pays

no

no debts if he can help it : and it is notorious, that in one of the wittiest and most popular comedies which this country has ever produced, those very passages which exalt liberality at the expence of justice, were nightly applauded with enthusiastic rapture by those deluded tradesmen, whom, perhaps, that very sentiment helped to keep out of their money.

BUT there is another sort of fashionable character, whose false brightness is still more pernicious, by casting a splendour over the most destructive vices. Corrupt manners, ruinous extravagance, and the most fatal passions

for

it is for play, are sometimes gilded over
with many engaging acts of charity,
and a general attention and respect to
the ceremonials of Christianity. But
this is degrading the venerable image
and supercription of religion, by stamp-
ing them on baser metal than they were
ever intended to impress. The young
and gay shelter themselves under such
examples, and scruple the less to adopt
the bad parts of such mixed characters,
when they see that an immoral con-
duct is so compatible with a religious
perfection.

BUT I digress from my intention ;
for it is not the purpose of this address
to

to take notice of any actions which the common consent of mankind has determined to be wrong, but of such, chiefly, as are practised by the sober, the decent, and the regular; and to drop a few hints on such less obvious offences as are, in general,

Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne.

Nor will the bounds which I have prescribed myself allow of my wandering into a wide and general field of observation.

THE idea of the present slight performance was suggested by reading the King's late excellent proclamation
against

against irreligion and immorality. Under the shelter of so high a sanction it may not be unseasonable to press on the hearts of the better disposed, such observances as seem to be generally overlooked; and to remark such offences as commonly elude censure, because they are not commonly thought censurable.

It is obvious to all serious persons, that that branch of the divine law, against which the better kind of people trespass with the least scruple, is the fourth commandment: many who would shudder at the violation of the other nine, seem without ceremony to ex-

C

punge

punge this from the divine code ; but by what authority they do this, has never been explained.—The Christian legislator does not seem to have abridged the commandments ; and there is no subsequent authority so much as pretended to by Protestants.

It is not here intended to take notice of such flagrant offences as lie open to the cognizance of higher tribunals ; or to pollute this paper with descanting on the holders of card assemblies on Sundays, the frequenters of taverns and gaming houses, the printers of Sunday newspapers, the proprietors of Sunday stage coaches, and others who openly
insult

insult the laws of the land ; laws which will always be held sacred by good citizens, even were not the law of God antecedent to them.

MANY of the order whom I here address are persons of the tenderest humanity, and not only wish well to the interests of virtue, but are favourably disposed to advance the cause of religion ; nay, would be extremely startled at not being thought sincerely religious : yet, from inconsideration, want of time, want of self-examination, want of suspecting the deceitfulness of the human heart, sometimes allow themselves in inattentions and negligences which ma-

terially affect their own safety, and the comforts of others.—While an animated spirit of charity seems to be kindled amongst us ; while there is a general disposition to instruct the ignorant, and to reform the vicious ; one cannot help regretting that these amiable exertions should be counteracted, in some degree, by practices of a directly opposite tendency, trifling in their appearance, but serious in their effects.

THERE are still among us petty domestic evils, which seem too inconsiderable to claim redress.—There is an aggrieved body of men in our very capital, whose spiritual hardships seem scarcely

scarcely to have been taken into consideration, I mean the HAIR DRESSERS, on whom

The Sunday shines, no day of rest to them.

Is there not a peculiar degree of unkindness in exercising such cruelty on the souls of men, whose whole lives are employed in embellishing our persons? And is it quite conceivable how a lady's conscience is able to make such nice distinctions, that she would be shocked at the idea of sending for her mantua-maker, or milliner, her carpenter, or mason, on a Sunday, while she makes no scruple regularly to employ a hair-dresser?

Is it not almost ridiculous to observe the zeal we have for doing good at a distance, while we neglect the little obvious, every-day domestic duties, which should seem to solicit our immediate attention? But an action ever so right and meritorious, which is only to be periodically performed, at distant intervals, is less burthen some to corrupt nature, than an undeviating attention to such small, constant, right habits as are hostile to our natural indolence, and would be perpetually vexing and disturbing our self-love. The weak heart indulges its infirmity, by allowing itself intermediate omissions, and habitual neglects of duty, reposing itself for safety,

on

on regular, but remote returns of stated performances. It is less trouble to subscribe to the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts, than to have daily prayers in our own families: and I am persuaded that there are multitudes of well-meaning people who would gladly contribute to a mission of Christianity to Japan or Otaheite, to whom it never occurred, that the hair-dresser, whom they are every Sunday detaining from church, has a soul to be saved; that the law of the land co-operates with the law of God, to forbid their employing him; and that they have no right, either legal or moral, to this proportion of his time.—The poor man himself, perhaps,

haps, dares not remonstrate, for fear he should be deprived of his employment for the rest of the week. If there were no other objection to a pleasurable Sunday among the great and the affluent, methinks this single one might operate: would not a devout heart be unwilling to rob a fellow creature of his time for devotion, or a humane one of his hour of rest?

It is strange that there should be so little consistency in human conduct, that the same persons should gladly contribute to spread the light of Christianity in another hemisphere; while, by their example, they actually obstruct
the

the progress of it at home. But it is, I doubt not, much oftener owing to the imperceptible influence of custom and habit, than to a decided ill intention. Besides, it may be in morals as it is in optics, the eye and the object may come too close to each other, to answer the end of vision. There are certain faults which press too near our self-love to be even perceptible to us.

THERE is an evil newly crept into polished society, and it comes under a mask so specious, that they are chiefly good sort of people who are allured by it; I mean SUNDAY CONCERTS.—— Many, who would be startled at a prophane,

phane, or even an idle amusement think that the name of *sacred music* sanctifies the diversion. But if those who live in ease and affluence do not make these petty renunciations of their own ways, and their own pleasure, what criterion have we by which to judge of their sincerity? For as the goodness of Providence has exempted them from painful occupations, they have neither labour from which to rest, nor business from which to refrain. A little abstinence from pleasure is the only evidence of their obedience to the divine precept.

I KNOW with what indignant scorn this remark will, by many, be received: that

that much will be advanced in favour of
the sanctity of this amusement. I shall
be told that the words are, many of
them, extracted from the Bible, and that
the composition is the divine Handel's.
But were the angel Gabriel the poet,
the archangel Michael the composer, and
the Song of the Lamb the subject, it
would not abrogate that statute of the
Most High, which has said, "Thou
" shalt keep holy the Sabbath day, and
" thy SERVANT, and thy CATTLE, shall
" do no manner of work."—I am per-
suaded that the hallelujahs of Heaven
would make no moral music to the ear
of a conscientious person, while he re-
flected that multitudes of servants are
waiting

waiting in the streets, exposed to every temptation: engaged, perhaps, in profane swearing, and idle if not dissolute conversation: and the very cattle are deprived of that rest which the tender mercy of God was graciously pleased, by an astonishing condescension, to include in the commandment.

BUT I will, for the sake of argument, so far concede as to allow of the innocence, and even piety of Sunday concerts: I will suppose (what, however, does not always happen) that no unhallowed strains are ever introduced; that some attend these concerts with a view to cultivate devout affections; that they

cherish

cherish the serious impressions excited by the music, and retire in such a frame of spirit as convinces them that the heart was touched while the ear was gratified: Nay, I *would* grant, if such a concession would be accepted, that the intervals were filled up with conversation, “whereby one may edify another:”—Yet all these good effects, allowing them really to have been produced, will not remove the invincible objection of an evil example; and what liberal spirit would refuse any reasonable sacrifice of its own pleasure to so important a motive? Your servants have been accustomed to consider a concert as a secular diversion; if you, therefore, continue

D

it

it on a Sunday, will not they also expect to be indulged on that day with their common amusements?—Saint Paul, who was a very liberal thinker, believed it prudent to make frequent sacrifices of things indifferent in themselves. He was willing to deny himself a harmless and lawful gratification, *even as long as the world stood*, rather than shock the tender consciences of men of less understanding. Where a practice is neither good nor evil in itself, it is both discreet and generous to avoid it, if it can be attended with any possible danger to minds less enlightened, and to faith less confirmed.

BUT,

BUT, religion apart, I have sometimes wondered that people do not yield to the temptation that is held out to them, of abstaining from diversions one day in seven, upon motives of mere human policy; as voluptuaries sometimes fast, to give a keener relish to the delights of the next repast. For pleasure, like an over-fed lamp, is extinguished by the excess of its own aliment. But the lovers of pleasure are not always prudent, even upon their own principles; for I am persuaded that the world would afford much more real satisfaction than it does, if we did not press, and torture, and strain it, to yield what it does not contain. Much

good, and much pleasure, it does liberally bestow; but no labour, or art, can extract from it that elixir of peace, that divine essence of content, which it is not in its nature to produce. There is good sense in searching into every blessing for its *hidden* properties; but it is folly to ransack and plunder it for such as the experience of all ages tells us are *foreign* to it. We exhaust the world of its pleasures, and then lament that it is empty; we wring those pleasures to the very dregs, and then complain that they are vapid.

I SHALL, probably, be accused of a very narrow and fanatical spirit, in animadverting

madverting on a practice so little suspected of harm as the frequenting of public walks and gardens on a Sunday: and certainly, there cannot be an amusement more entirely harmless in itself. But I must appeal to the honest testimony of our own hearts if the *effect* be favourable to seriousness? Do we commonly retire from those places with the impressions which were made on us at church in their full force? We entered these sprightly scenes, perhaps, with a strong remaining tincture of that devout spirit which the public worship had infused into the mind. But have we not felt it gradually diminish? Have not our powers of resistance grown insensibly

weaker? The doctrines which in the morning appeared the sober dictates of reason, now seem unreasonably rigid; and truths which were then thought incontrovertible, now appear impertinent. To answer arguments is much easier than to withstand allurements. The understanding may controvert a startling proposition with less difficulty than the sliding heart can resist the infection of seducing gaiety. To oppose a cold and speculative faith to the illusion of present pleasure, is to fight with inadequate weapons: it is resisting *arms* with *rules*; it is combating a temptation with an idea. Whereas, he who engages in the Christian warfare, will find that his
chief

chief strength consists in knowing that he is very weak; that to retreat from danger is his highest glory, and to decline the combat, his truest courage.

WHATEVER indisposes the mind for the duty of any particular season, tho' it assume ever so innocent a form, cannot be perfectly right. If the heart be laid open to the incursion of vain imaginations, and worldly thoughts, it matters little by what gate the enemy entered. If the effect be injurious, the cause cannot be quite harmless. It is the perfidious property of certain pleasures,

fures, that, though they seem not to have the smallest harm in themselves, they imperceptibly indispose the mind to every thing that is good.

MANY readers will be apt to produce against all this preciseness, that hackneyed remark which one is tired of hearing, that Sunday diversions are allowed publicly in many foreign countries, as well in those professing the reformed religion, as popery. But the corruptions of one part of the Protestant world are no reasonable justification of the evil practices of another. Error and infirmity can never be proper objects of imitation. It is still a remnant

nant of the old leaven : and as to pleading the practice of Roman Catholic countries, one blushes to hear an enlightened Protestant justifying himself by examples drawn from that benighted religion.

BESIDES, though I am far from vindicating the amusements permitted on Sundays in foreign countries, by allowing that established custom, and long prescription, have the privilege of conferring right ; yet foreigners may, at least, plead the sanction of custom, and the connivance of the law. While in this country the law of the land, and established usage, concurring with still
higher.

higher motives, give a sort of venerable sanction to religious observances, the breach of which will be always more liable to misconstruction than in countries where so many motives do not concur.

I AM not an advocate for the severity of a Jewish, or the moroseness of a Puritanical sabbath. I am likewise far from inferring that all those who neglect a strict observation of a Sunday, are remiss in the performance of their other duties : but I will venture to affirm, that all whom I have remarked conscientiously to observe this day from right motives, have been uniformly attentive to their general conduct. It

has

has been the opinion of many wise and good men, * that Christianity will stand, or fall, as this day is neglected, or observed. Sunday seems to be a kind of
Christian

* The testimony of one lawyer will, perhaps, be less suspected than that of many priests.—
“ I have ever found,” says the great Lord Chief Justice Hale, “ by a strict and diligent observation, that a due observance of the duty of Sunday has ever had joined to it a blessing upon the rest of my time; and the week that has been so begun has been blessed and prosperous to me: and, on the other side, when I have been negligent of the duties of this day, the rest of the week has been unsuccessful and unhappy to my own secular employments. So that I could easily
make

Christian Palladium; and the city of God will never be totally taken by the enemy till the observance of that be quite lost. Every sincere soldier of the great Captain of our Salvation must, therefore, exert himself in its defence, as ever he would defend the divine Fort of Revelation against the confederated attacks of the world and the Devil.

make an estimate of my successes the week following, by the manner of my passing this day.

AND I DO NOT WRITE THIS LIGHTLY, BUT BY LONG AND SOUND EXPERIENCE."

Sir Matthew Hale's Works.

I SHALL

I SHALL proceed to enumerate a few of the many causes which seem to impede well disposed people in the progress of religion: none, perhaps, contributes more to it than that cold, prudential caution against the folly of aiming at *perfection*; so frequent in the mouths of the worldly wise, “We must take the “world,” say they, “as we find it; “reformation is not the business of individuals, and we are commanded “not to be righteous overmuch.” But these admonitions are contrary to every maxim in human affairs: in arts and letters * the most consummate models
are

* When Pliny the younger was accused of despising the degenerate eloquence of his own

E

age,

are held out to imitation. We never hear any body cautioned against becoming too wise, too learned, or too rich: zeal, in business, is accounted commendable; in friendship it is amiable; in all the perishing concerns of earthly things it is extolled as exhibiting marks of a sprightly temper, and a vigorous mind. Strange! that to be "fervent in spirit," should only be dishonourable in that single instance which

age, and of the vanity of aspiring at perfection in oratory, and of endeavouring to be the rival of Cicero, instead of denying the charge, he exclaimed with a noble spirit, *STULTISSIMUM credo, ad imitandum non OPTIMA quæ proponere.*

should

should seem to demand unremitting diligence, and unextinguished warmth.

AMONG the devices dangerous to our moral safety, certain favourite and specious maxims are not the least successful, as they carry with them an imposing air of indulgent candour, and always seem to be on the popular side of good nature. One of the most obvious of these is, that method of reconciling the conscience to practices not decidedly wicked, and yet not scrupulously right, by the qualifying phrase, *that there is no harm in it*. I am mistaken, if more innocent persons do not inflame their spiritual reckoning by this treacherous

apology than by almost any other means. Few are systematically, or premeditatedly wicked, or propose to themselves, at first, more than such small indulgences as they are persuaded *have no harm in them*. But this latitude is gradually and imperceptibly enlarged: as the expression is vague and indeterminate; as the darkest shade of virtue, and the lightest shade of vice, melt into no very incongruous colouring; as the bounds between good and evil are not always so precisely defined, but that he who ventures to the confines of the one, will find himself on the borders of the other; every one furnishes his own definition; every one extends the supposed limits a little

little farther; till the bounds which fence in permitted from unlawful pleasures are gradually broken down, and the marks which separated them imperceptibly destroyed.

It is, perhaps, one of the most alarming symptoms of the degeneracy of morals in the present day, that the distinctions of right and wrong are almost swept away in polite conversation. The most serious crimes are often named with cool indifference; the most shameful profligacy with affected tenderness. This must certainly contribute, more than any thing, to diminish the horror of vice in the rising generation. That

our passions should be too often engaged on the side of error, we may look for the cause, though not for the vindication, in the unresisted propensities of our constitution: but that our reason should ever be employed in its favour, that our conversation should ever be taught to palliate it, that our judgment should ever look on it with indifference, has no shadow of excuse, because this can pretend to no foundation in nature, no apology in temptation, no palliative in passion.

HOWEVER defective, therefore, our practice may be, however we may be allured by seduction, or precipitated by
passion,

passion, let us beware of lowering the STANDARD OF RIGHT : this induces an imperceptible corruption into the heart, stagnates the noblest principle of action, irrecoverably debases the sense of moral and religious obligation, and prevents us from living up to the height of our nature : it cuts off all communication with virtue, and almost prevents the possibility of a return to it. If we do not rise as high as we aim, we shall rise the higher for having aimed at a lofty mark : but where the RULE is now, the practice cannot be high, though the converse of the proposition is not proportionably true.

NOTHING

NOTHING more benumbs the exertions of ardent youthful virtue, than the cruel sneer which worldly prudence bestows on active goodness, and the cool derision it expresses at the defeat of a benevolent scheme; of which malice, rather than penetration, had foreseen the failure. Alas! there is little need of any such discouragements. The world is a climate which too naturally chills a glowing generosity, and contracts an expanded heart. The zeal of the most sanguine is but too apt to cool, and the activity of the most diligent to slacken of itself: and the disappointments which benevolence encounters in the failure of her best concerted projects,

jects, and the frequent depravity of the most chosen objects of her bounty, would soon dry up the amplest streams of charity, were they not feed by the living fountain of religious principles.

BUT if, on the one hand, there is a proud and arrogant discretion which ridicules, as Utopian and romantic, every generous project of the active and the liberal; so there is on the other, a sort of popular bounty which arrogates to itself the exclusive name of *feeling*, and rejects with disdain the influence of an higher principle. I am far from intending to depreciate this humane, and exquisitely tender sentiment, which the
bene-

beneficent Author of our nature gave us, as a stimulus to remove the distresses of others, in order to get rid of our own uneasiness. I would only observe, that where not strengthened by superior motives, it is a casual and precarious instrument of good, and ceases to operate, except in the immediate presence, and within the audible cry of misery. This sort of feeling forgets that any calamity exists which is out of its own sight; and though it would empty its purse for such an occasional object as rouses transient sensibility, yet it seldom makes any stated provision for miseries, which are not the less real because they do not obtrude upon the sight, and awaken the

tender-

tendernefs of immediate fympathy.—
This is a mechanical charity, which
requires fprings and wheels to fet it a-
going ; whereas, real Chriftian charity
does not wait to be acted upon by im-
preffions and impulfes.

A FARTHER danger to good kind of
people feems to arife from a miftaken
idea, that only great and actual fins are
to be guarded againft. Whereas, fins
of omiffion make up perhaps, the moft
formidable part of *their* catalogue of
offences.—Thefe generally fupply in
number what they want in weight, and
are the more dangerous for being little
offenfible. They continue to be re-
peated

peated with less regret, because the remembrance of their predecessors does not, like the remembrance of formal actual crimes, assume a body and a shape, and terrify by the impression of particular scenes and circumstances. While the memory of transacted evil haunts a tender conscience by perpetual apparition, omitted duty having no local or personal existence, not being recorded by standing acts and deeds, and having no distinct image to which the mind may recur, sinks into quiet oblivion, without deeply wounding the conscience, or tormenting the imagination. These omissions were, perhaps, among the "secret sins," from which the royal penitent

penitent so earnestly desired to be cleansed: and it is worthy of the most serious consideration, that these are the offences against which the Gospel pronounces the most alarming denunciations. It is less against actual than negative evil, that affectionate exhortation, lively remonstrance, and pointed parable, are exhausted. It is against the tree which bore no fruit, the lamp which had no oil, the unprofitable servant who made no use of his talent, that the severe sentence is denounced; and not against *corrupt* fruit, *bad* oil, and talents *ill* employed. We are led to believe, from the same high authority, that omitted duties, and neglected opportunities, will

furnish no inconsiderable portion of our future condemnation. A very awful part of the decision, in the great day of accounts, seems to be reserved merely for omissions and negatives. Ye gave me NO meat; ye gave me NO drink; ye took me NOT in; ye visited me NOT. On the punishment attending positive crimes, as being more naturally obvious, more logically consequent, it was not, perhaps, thought so necessary to insist.

ANOTHER cause which still further impedes the reception of Religion even among the well disposed, is, that garment of sadness in which people delight

to

to suppose her dressed ; and that life of hard austerity, and pining abstinence, which they pretend she enjoins her disciples. And it were well if this were only the misrepresentation of her declared enemies ; but, unhappily, it is the too frequent misconception of her injudicious friends. But such an overcharged picture is not more unamiable than it is unlike : for I will venture to affirm, that Religion, with all her beautiful and becoming sanctity, imposes fewer sacrifices, not only of rational, but of pleasurable enjoyment, than the uncontrouled dominion of any one vice. Her service is not only perfect safety, but perfect freedom : she is not so ty-

rannizing as Passion, so exacting as the World, nor so despotic as Fashion.— Let us try the case by a parallel, and examine it, not as affecting our virtue, but our pleasure. Does Religion forbid the chearful enjoyments of life as rigorously as Avarice forbids them?— Does she require such sacrifice of our ease as Ambition? or such renunciations of our quiet as Pride? Does Devotion murder sleep like Dissipation? Does she destroy Health like Intemperance? Does she annihilate Fortune like Gaming? Does she imbitter Life like Discord; or abridge it like Duelling? Does Religion impose more vigilance than Suspicion? or half so many mortifications

as

as Vanity? Vice has her martyrs: and the most austere and self-denying Ascetic (who mistakes the genius of Christianity almost as much as her enemies) never tormented himself with such cruel and causeless severity as that with which Envy lacerates her unhappy votaries.—Worldly honour obliges us to be at the trouble of resenting injuries; but Religion spares us that inconvenience by commanding us to forgive them; and by this injunction consults our happiness no less than our virtue: for the torment of constantly hating any one must be, at least, equal to the sin of it.—If this estimate be fairly made, then is the balance clearly on the side

of Religion, even in the article of pleasure. *A private and self-denying*

It is an infirmity not uncommon to good kind of people, to comfort themselves that they live in the exercise of some one natural good quality, and to make a religious merit of a constitutional happiness.——They have also a strong propensity to separate what God has joined, belief and practice; the creed and the commandments; actions and motives; moral duty and religious obedience. Whereas, you will hardly find, in all the New Testament, a moral, or a social virtue that is not hedged in by some religious injunction:—

Scarcely

Scarcely a good action enjoined towards others, but it is connected to some exhortation to personal purity. All the charities of benevolence are, in general, so agreeable to the natural make of the heart, that it is a very tender mercy of God to have made that a duty, which, to finer spirits, would have been irresistible as an inclination; and to annex the highest future reward to the greatest present pleasure. But in order to give a religious sanction to a social virtue, the duty of visiting the fatherless and widow in their affliction, is inseparably attached to the difficult and self-denying injunctions of keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. This adjunct is the
more

more needful, as many are apt to make a kind of moral commutation, and to allow themselves so much pleasure in exchange for so much charity. But one good quality can never stand proxy for another. The Christian virtues derive their highest lustre from association: they have such a spirit of society, that they are weak and imperfect when solitary; their radiance are brightened by communication, and their natural strength multiplied by their alliance with each other.

It cannot be denied that good sort of people sometimes use religion as the voluptuous use phyc. As the latter employ

employ medicine to make health agree with luxury, the former consider religion as a medium to reconcile peace of conscience with a life of pleasure. But no moral chemistry can blend natural contradictions; the world will still be uppermost, and religion will disdain to coalesce with its antipathy.

LET me not be suspected of intending to insinuate that religion encourages men to fly from society, and hide themselves in solitudes; to renounce the generous and important duties of active life, for the visionary, cold, and fruitless virtues of an Hermitage, or a Cloyster. No: the mischief arises not from our living

living in the world, but from the world living in us ; occupying our hearts, and monopolizing our affections. Action is the life of virtue, and the world is the noblest theatre of action. Perhaps some of the most perfect patterns of human conduct may be found in the most public stations, and among the busiest orders of mankind. It is, indeed, a scene of trial, but the glory of the triumph is proportioned to the peril of the conflict. A sense of danger quickens circumspection, and makes virtue more vigilant. Lot maintained his integrity in a great city, proverbially wicked, and forfeited it in the bosom of retirement.

It

It has been said that worldly good
fort of people are a greater credit to
their profession, by exhibiting more
cheerfulness, gaiety and happiness, than
are visible in serious Christians. If this
assertion be true, which I very much
suspect, is it not probable that the ap-
parent ease and gaiety of the former
may be derived from the same source of
consolation which Mrs. Quickly recom-
mends to Falstaff, in Shakespeare's ad-
mirable picture of the death-bed scene
of that witty profligate? "He wished
"for comfort, quoth mine hostess, and
"began to talk of God; now I, to
"comfort him, begged him he should
"not think of God: it was time enough

"to

“to trouble himself with these things.”

Do not many deceive themselves by drawing water from these dry wells of comfort? and patch up a precarious and imperfect happiness in this world, by diverting their attention from the concerns of the next?

ANOTHER obstruction to the growth of piety, is that unworthy prejudice which even good kind of people too often entertain against those who differ from them in opinion. Every man who is sincerely in earnest to advance the interests of religion, will have acquired such a degree of candour, as to become indifferent by whom good is done,

done, or who has the reputation of doing it, provided it be actually done.

He will be anxious to increase the stock of human virtue, and of human happiness, by every possibly means. He will whet and sharpen every instrument of goodness, though it be not cast in his own mould, or fashioned after his own pattern. He will never consider whether the form suits his own particular taste, but whether the instrument itself be calculated to accomplish the work of his master. It is a test by which he will be able to judge of his own sincerity, if the delight he feels at hearing of a meritorious action suffers no abatement, because it was performed by one

G

who

who differs from him in his religious, or even his political sentiments.

I SHALL conclude these loose and immethodical hints with a general address to those who content themselves with a decent profession of the doctrines, instead of a diligent discharge of the duties of Christianity. Believe, and forgive me:—you are the people who lower religion in the eyes of its enemies. The openly prophane,* the

* In the last days shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, &c. &c. 11 Peter, chap. iii. ver. 3. with a multitude of other texts to the same purpose.

avowed

avowed enemies to God and goodness, confirm the truths they mean to oppose, illustrate the doctrines they deny, and accomplish the predictions they disbelieve. But you, like an inadequate and faithless prop, overturn the edifice which you pretend to support.—When an acute and keen-eyed infidel measures your lives with the rule by which you profess to walk, he finds so little analogy between them, the copy is so unlike the pattern, that this inconsistency of yours is the pass through which his most dangerous attack is made. And I must confess, that of all the arguments, which the malignant industry of infidelity has been able to muster, the conduct of

professing Christians seems to me to be the only one which is really capable of staggering a man of sense.——He hears of a spiritual and self-denying religion ; he reads the beatitudes ; he observes that the grand artillery of the Gospel is planted against pride. He then turns to the transcript of this perfect original ; the lives which pretend to be fashioned by it. There he sees, with triumphant derision, that pride, self-love, self-sufficiency, and an inordinate appetite for pleasure, are reputable vices in the eyes of many of those who acknowledge the truth of the Christian doctrines. He weighs that meekness to which a blessing is promised, with that
arrogance

arrogance which is too common to be very dishonourable. He compares that non-conformity to the world, which the Bible makes the criterion of a believer, with that rage for amusement which is not considered as disreputable in a Christian. He opposes the self-denying and lowly character of the Author of our faith with the sensual practices of his followers. He finds little resemblance between the restraints prescribed, and the gratifications indulged in. What conclusions must a speculative reasoning, sceptic drawn from such premises? Is it any wonder that such phrases as a broken spirit, a contrite heart, poverty of spirit, refraining the soul, keeping it

low, and casting down high imaginations, should be to the unbeliever "foolishness," when such humiliating doctrines are a "stumbling block" to professing Christians, who cannot always cordially relish a religion which professedly tells them it was sent to stain the pride of human glory, and to exclude boasting?

BUT though the passive and self-denying virtues are not high in the esteem of mere good sort of people, yet they are peculiarly the evangelical virtues. The world extols brilliant actions; the Gospel enjoins good habits and right motives:

motives: it seldom inculcates those splendid deeds which make heroes, or those founding sentences which constitute philosophers; but it enjoins the harder task of renouncing self, of living uncorrupted in the world, of subduing besetting sins, and of not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. The acquisition of glory was the precept of other religions, the contempt of it is the perfection of Christianity.

LET us then be consistent, and we shall never be contemptible, even in the eyes of our enemies. Let not the unbeliever say that we have one set of opinions

nions for our theory, and another for our practice; that to the vulgar

We shew the rough and thorny way to
heav'n,

While we the primrose path of dalliance
tread.

It would become our characters as men of sense, of which consistency is a most unequivocal proof, to choose some rule and abide by it. An extempore Christian is a ridiculous character.—— Fixed principles will be followed by a consistent course of action, while indecision of spirit will produce instability of conduct. If there be a model which

we

we profess to admire, let us square our lives by it. If the Koran of Mahomet, or the Revelations of Zoroaster, be a perfect guide, let us follow one of them.—If either Epicurus, Zeno, or Confucius, be the peculiar object of our veneration and respect, let us fashion our conduct by the dictates of their philosophy; and then, though we may be wrong, we shall not be absurd. But if the Bible be in truth the word of God, as we profess to believe, we need look no farther for a consummate pattern.—Let us then make it the rule of our practice here, if it is indeed to be the rule of our judgment hereafter.

BUT

BUT I am willing to flatter myself that the moral and intellectual scene about us begins to brighten. I indulge myself in moments of the most enthusiastic and delightful vision; taking encouragement from that glorious prophecy, that “of the increase of his government there shall be no end;” a prediction which seems to be gradually accomplishing: and in no instance more, perhaps, than in the noble attempt about to be made for the abolition of the African slave-trade. For what event can human wisdom foresee more likely to contribute to “give the Son the “Heathen for his inheritance, and the “uttermost parts of the earth for his
“possession.”

“possession,” than the success of such an enterprize, which will restore the lustre of the Christian name, too long sullied with oppression, cruelty, and injustice?

A good spirit seems to be at work. A catholic temper is diffusing itself among all sects and parties; an enlightened candour, and liberal toleration were never more prevalent; good men combat each other's opinions with less rancour, and better manners. We have many public encouragements; we have a pious king; a wise and virtuous minister; many respectable, and not a few serious, clergy. (May their number
daily

daily increase!) Among these some of the first in dignity are the first in conduct. An increasing desire to instruct the poor, to inform the ignorant, and to reclaim the vicious, is spreading among us. The late Royal Proclamation affords an honourable sanction to virtuous endeavours, and lends nerves and sinews to the otherwise feeble exertions of individuals, by enforcing laws wisely planned, but hitherto feebly executed. In short, there is a good hope that we shall more and more become that happy people who have the Lord for their God: that as prosperity is already within our walls, peace and virtue may abide in our dwellings.

BUT

BUT vain will be all endeavours after *partial* and *subordinate* amendment. Reformation must begin with the GREAT, or it will never be effectual. *Their* example is the fountain from whence the vulgar draw their habits, actions, and characters. To expect to reform the poor while opulent are corrupt, is to throw odours into the stream, while the springs are poisoned. Even the excellent institution of Sunday schools for training religious servants, will avail but little, if, as soon as the persons there educated, come into the families of the great, they behold practices diametrically opposite to the instructions they

H

have

have been imbibing. If they fall into the houses of the profligate, they will hear the doctrines which they have been taught to reverence, derided; if into mere worldly families, they will see them neglected: and to the essential principle of vital Christianity, oblivion is scarcely less fatal than contempt.

If, therefore, the rich and great will not, from a liberal spirit of doing right, abstain from those offences, for which the poor are to suffer fines and imprisonments, effectual good cannot be done. It will signify little, to lay penalties on the horses of the drover, or on the waggon of the husbandman, while the cha-

riot

riot wheels of the great roll with incessant motion: and the sacred day on which the sons of industry are commanded by royal proclamation to desist from travelling, is for that very reason selected for the journeys of the great, and preferred, because the road is incumbered with fewer interruptions. But will it not strike every well-meaning Sunday traveller with a generous remorse when he reflects that he owes the accommodation of an unobstructed road to the very obedience which is paid by others to that divine and human law which he is in the very act of violating?

WILL not the common people think it a little inequitable that they are abridged of the diversions of the public-house and the gaming-yard on Sunday evening, when they shall hear that many houses of the first nobility are on that evening crowded with company, and such amusements carried on as are prohibited by human laws even on common days? As imitation, and a desire of being in the fashion, govern the lower orders of mankind, it is to be feared that they will not think reformation reputable, while they see it recommended only, and not practised by their betters. A precept counteracted by an example,
is

is worse than fruitless, it is ridiculous : and the common people will be tempted to set an inferior value on goodness, when they find it is only expected from the lower ranks. They cannot surely but smile at the disinterestedness of their superiors, who, while they seem anxiously concerned to save others, are so little solicitous about their own state.— The ambitious vulgar will hardly relish a salvation which is only intended for Plebeians : nor will they be apt to entertain very exalted notions of that promised future reward, the road to which they perceive their betters are so much more earnest to point out to *them*, than to walk in themselves.

It was not by inflicting pains and penalties that Christianity first made its way into the world: the divine truths it inculcated received irresistible confirmation from the LIVES, PRACTICES, and EXAMPLES, of its venerable professors. These were arguments which no popular prejudice could resist, no Jewish logic refute, and no Pagan persecution discredit. Had the primitive Christians only *praised* and *promulgated* the most perfect religion the world ever saw, it could have produced but very slender effects on the faith and manners of the people, if the jealous and inquisitive eye of malice could have detected

ed

ed that the DOCTRINES they recommended were not illustrated by the LIVES they led.

F I N I S.

